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ABSTRACT

Many suggestions are given for directly involving students in the various forms of the media. Instamatic cameras, tape recorders, 35mm cameras, videotape recorders, Super 8 cameras, phonograph players, and film projectors are some pieces of equipment typically available to schools which can be used creatively by students. In addition to making films or illustrating themes through the use of still camera shots, unlimited possibilities are seen in various combinations of media forms. The active experimenting of students with these forms, if given structure and direction by the teacher, are said to be the type of learning experience that provides a needed lift in any subject. (CL)

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Creative Involvement with the Media

Thomas B. Goodkind

University of Connecticut

A few years ago several events occurred during the span of about two weeks that stirred me to experimentation with a variety of media forms. First, I attended a national audio-visual convention in Atlantic City where I was overwhelmed with the tremendous variety of equipment and devices, primarily "hardware," that were supposed to be designed for creative instructional use in the classroom. I asked several salesmen how things were selling. Their responses were ecstatic, "Great! Schools are really spending money this year! Couldn't be better!" As I listened to the pitches of many of the salesmen I became very upset for their approach and understanding of what goes on in a good classroom environment represented a sadly outmoded and stereotyped view. Moreover, much of the machinery they were selling, as well as the "software," represented in my view not something new and different, but a substitution of one kind of old, formal textbook approach with another textbook approach in slightly different form. Most of what I saw represented a passive idea of educational involvement rather than an active one. It was in direct contradiction with what we supposedly have learned about child growth and development, the ways in which children learn best and most effectively. It seemed to contradict just common sense observation of children in a learning environment.

During this "memorable" period, I also visited half a dozen public schools only to find great quantities of expensive audio-visual equipment gathering dust. What little was being used showed very little imagination, to say the least, and students were not involved in its use at all. The third event was the viewing of several films and television programs; one of each involving Marshall McLuhan (remember him!), the film *Child of the Future*; the film,

My Name Is Children; and Bill Cosby's television program on filmmaking by children. I was impressed.

These experiences dramatically reinforced my own view on the critical need for the direct involvement of students in the various forms of the media—all of which have had a real impact upon the lives, attitudes, knowledge, and values of young people, as McLuhan and others have pointed out.

My own experience with kids indicated a continual desire to be involved, even if it was something simple like operating equipment themselves. Children are naturally curious about things, especially machinery and how it works. But, there are many excuses to be heard, such as "This equipment costs thousands of dollars and they might damage it!", "Children are so careless", and "It's too complicated for them to use."

I decided to spend some time experimenting with typical pieces of equipment which could be found in, or made available to many schools, including simple Instamatic cameras, tape recorders, 35mm cameras, videotape recorders, Super 8 cameras, phonograph players, film projectors, etc. What could be done in a simple way with the various forms of media and corresponding types of equipment?

I was impressed with the simplicity of most of the equipment. As a rule of thumb, I followed the idea that if I was curious about some piece of equipment or its use, that probably kids would be also. My hunches were supported, however, by what I had seen on television and in films.

I would like to share with you some of my discoveries and offer some specific suggestions for activities you may wish to try with your students or by yourself. For the purpose of this article, the various forms of media fall into six categories: (1) *pictures,* such as from magazines and newspapers, books, paintings, sketches, etc.; (2) *prints,* from photographic film such as black & white or color Instamatic prints; (3) *slides,* from film transparencies, such as

b & w or color 35mm; (4) motion picture *film,* such as b & w or color 16mm or Super 8mm; (5) *audio-tape recordings,* reel-to-reel or cassettes; and (6) *videotape recordings,* picture and sound, low-priced, usually ½-inch equipment.

How could this variety of media forms be combined effectively with the various types of equipment, singly or in different combinations, to produce something worthwhile to students.

With some time and experimentation I found the following things were possible:

1. 35 mm color slides could be projected on a screen in a dark room and videotaped with the camera setting wide open.
2. 16 mm and Super 8 mm film could be projected on a screen in a dark room and videotaped with the camera setting wide open.
3. Live radio programs could be sound-dubbed in on videotape recordings as well as easily audio-taped.
4. Live television programs could be recorded directly off the air on videotape.
5. Phonograph recordings could be audio-taped and sound-dubbed on videotape.
6. Audio-tape recordings could be dubbed in on videotape.
7. Videotape recordings could be retaped on another videotape recorder.
8. Live videotape recordings could be made easily of individuals, pictures, prints, etc., recorded with the video camera.

With this information, I built a forty-minute program on videotape, entitled "Media or Tedia," with the purpose to illustrate (1) a dramatic contrast between formal, traditional, textbook-oriented teaching and more informal, modern teaching employing a variety of media forms, (2) the contrast between passive and active student involvement in the classroom, and (3) the many different media forms that can be utilized in various combinations on videotape.

The sequence of events are as follows:

1. no picture, sound only—recorded music, "Swingle Singers"
2. title, credits, brief explanation of purpose, primer-size type on card
3. no picture, sound only—recorded music, "Swingle Singers"
4. color slides of children in field camping as pioneers—background music, "Swingle Singers"
5. film excerpt of terrible teacher, "Alice Awful," from commercial film
6. film excerpt of interesting learning environment, from commercial film, "My Name Is Children"
7. no picture, sound only—recorded solemn, dirge music, "Swingle Singers"
8. repeat of part of film excerpt of "Alice Awful"
9. another excerpt of good learning environment, "My Name Is Children"
10. no picture, sound only—more dirge music—sound only from "Alice Awful"
11. third excerpt of good environment, kids playing game of Democracy, "My Name Is Children"
12. no picture, sound only—very brief excerpt from "Alice Awful"
13. live TV videotape recording of race riots in Detroit—4 minute excerpt
14. no picture, sound only—brief sound from "Alice Awful"
15. film excerpt of Netsilik Eskimos, no narration, commercial film
16. live camera recording of large pictures illustrating conflict in society
17. no picture, sound only—brief sound from "Alice Awful"
18. film excerpt from "Child of the Future" showing Japanese children involved with television
19. no picture, sound only—recorded music, "Swingle Singers"
20. ending, credits, fade out of music.

It is difficult to convey with this list the visual impact of

> the variety of media forms combined for this program, "Media or Tedia." The rapid contrast between good, involving learning situations and the sterile, passive, formal classroom of "Alice Awful" set a tone. It was overdone on purpose for impact. The color slides of the kids simulating a pioneer wagon train going west were enhanced by use of the zoom lens to key in on individual students in costume and the expressions on their faces.

By getting deeply involved in the various forms of the media and by understanding the possible role and impact of each form, we can perhaps help students to understand a little more about themselves, their lives, and the types of things that influence the ways in which they think, feel, and act. Such involvement, more importantly, gives them a chance to see things in a new and different way, through the camera's eye. Students become active producers rather than merely passive consumers. The process becomes more important than merely the product.

Okay! You don't have a videotape recorder. What are some simple things you can do with very little equipment?

Take a camera, an Instamatic, 35mm, or Polaroid. Select a theme and decide which three (and *only* three) pictures you would take if you were to illustrate the theme.† This forces an economy of film used and will encourage students to refine their thinking in telling a story simply, yet effectively. For example:

Theme: The Law is . . .

Picture one: three teenagers at roadside hitchhiking (looking at camera)

Picture two: three teenagers entering car that has stopped (rear view)

Picture three: three teenagers looking out from behind bars in jail (at camera)

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†See the following article for an in-depth study of this simple but effective use of film—Ed.

Theme: Pollution Is . . .

Picture one: Black smoke rising from factory smoke-stack

Picture two: Four people of varying ages having a picnic in a park, all coughing

Picture three: Four gravestones silhouetted against factory smokestacks in background.

The three-slide sequence forces the filmmaker to condense his ideas and planning into the three most effective pictures. A brief tape recording with background music adds considerably to the theme idea and mood illustrated by the slides or prints.

From these three-slide sequences, one can build a theme or program into a longer, more comprehensive one with added embellishments. From the still picture comes an awareness of the various perspectives that the single or short sequences of films can give. It will help in planning future productions with motion pictures and videotaping. Such initial training will also avoid wasteful and poorly thought-out use of film.

The story of how still pictures were first transformed into motion pictures is a fascinating one. Some background reading and a couple of simple experiments will help students to understand the "whys" of motion pictures, not merely the "whats." Motion pictures are a series of still photographs of the successive movements of an object. When rapidly projected onto a screen, the still photographs give the illusion of motion. This occurs because people have what is called "persistence of vision": the eye retains an image a fraction of a second longer than it actually exists. Sound motion pictures usually are projected at 24 frames or pictures a second.

Experiment One: the "thumb book." This is a simple series of drawings or sketches in a logical sequence placed together into a small book. When the pages are flipped or "thumbed," the in-

dividual drawings seem to melt into one continuous motion picture.

Cut some white paper into 3-inch squares. Draw an individual picture on each square in a sequence, with each picture slightly different from the previous one. Stick figures are easy. Perhaps it can be a figure jumping over a fence, running up a hill, jumping up and down, turning cartwheels. Clip or staple the square pages together and flip pages with thumb. Successful?

"Persistence of vision" can also be dramatically illustrated by constructing a zoetrope or "wheel of life." This is a slotted revolving drum through which can be seen objects in vivid motion. They are hand-drawn on strips of paper fitted inside the drum.

Experiment Two: the zoetrope: Take an old, round box, such as a hat box. With scissors, knife, or razor blade, cut slits vertically about three inches long and ¼ inch wide every three inches around the side of the box. (If you don't have a box, a piece of oak tag or cardboard about eight inches wide and at least 42 inches long will do. You will also need an old 12-inch phonograph record or disc to attach to the bottom of the oak tag or cardboard with masking tape.)

Take a long strip of paper, at least 3 inches wide and 42 inches long (adding machine paper is very good) or tape strips of shorter paper together. Draw connecting squares on the paper about three inches wide and at least two inches high along the length of the paper. The squares should be empty, with just the outline. In each square draw any kind of shape or figure with crayon, marking pen, or magic marker. Make sure that the series of drawings provide a sequence of events. Experience has shown stick figures do well jumping or running as well as an airplane propeller turning slightly with each picture in the series sequence. This sequence is similar to the 'thumb book" one except it is on a continuous strip of paper.

Draw the series from right to left, then try left to right. Place the long strip of paper with the drawings inside the box against the inside wall and make sure the paper is below the level of the

slits. Place the box on something that will rotate freely, such as a Lazy Susan or a portable record player (you will need to cut a small hole in the bottom of the box for the spindle of the record player, making sure to center the hole). Turn the machine on so the box will rotate. Look through the slits and you should see your individual figures on the paper inside come to life and move. Experiment with different speed settings for the record player (a variable speed one is best) to get the best "synchronization" of pictures. You will easily see with some experimentation what type of pictures show up the best, the colors, thickness, speeds, etc. The possibilities are unlimited. And it's fun! What gives the motion to motion pictures?

One thing that has intrigued me in recent years has been the unlimited possibilities of the various combinations of media forms. Used togther we have at our disposal a fascinating variety of situations and materials to put together into an unusual story, dramatization, theme, visual essay, etc. This should enable the student to see through the media forms life about them in a new and broader perspective.

The possibilities? pictures with film, slides with videotape, film with videotape, prints with slides, tape with pictures, film with tape, pictures with tape, etc. Combinations of two together, three together, four . . . the possibilities are unlimited!

Experimentation often brings about unusual discoveries. Some of the techniques of the "professionals" were encountered quite by accident when I videotaped color slides projected on a screen in a dark room. When the slide-darkness-slide sequence was in progress, an unusual after-image from the slide remained on the videotape, slowly fading out. This is similar to the fade-in, fade-out of professional filmmaking. This is a result of the camera being wide open in the darkened room. This after-image smooths out the usual harsh picture-darkness-picture sequence when showing a series of slides.

Another visual technique discovered was the effects of zooming

in and out on the projected slide. By zooming in on one section or person in the slide, focus is given to something special or a significant part of the whole slide. Movement of the camera around the surface of the screen and its projected slide picture gives a feeling of movement. This is similar to some of the interesting visual techniques seen on commercial television specials on the Civil War, for example, where a feeling of movement and action is given by moving the camera along a still picture. With added background music or commentary and the zoom and movement possibilities, ordinary color slides (perhaps even those summer vacation slides that seem to bore your friends!) can be turned into a more interesting and varied program.

One thing needs to be pointed out. The degree of sophistication of a film or videotape recording is not dependent upon the quality or expense of the equipment. The quality of the subject or theme, the planning, simple training, and some good common sense are most important.

During the summer of 1970 I was invited by the Ministry of Education in Uganda, East Africa to help produce an inexpensive series of in-service training films to help introduce a new English language program to teachers and children throughout the country. The emphasis was upon simplicity, low expense, and clarity for teachers. Using an inexpensive Super-8 camera with a synchronized cassette tape recorder and color film, eighteen films were produced ranging in length from four to eighteen minutes. Each film illustrated a specific English lesson with a typical Ugandan teacher teaching typical children the lesson. The idea was to present briefly in simple visual form a model for other teachers to see and identify and learn. Behind this project was a desire to experiment with the most modern and yet simple inexpensive method to retrain teachers. It was successful. Latest word is that over fifty teacher-trainers and 3,000 teachers have been exposed to the output of the project.

Most commercial shooting ratios (amount of film shot compared to amount actually used in final form) are 20:1 or 30:1 or more.

Our shooting ratio was 1½: 1. It worked, with a few goofs. One way in which we saved money on film and expenses was through the use of a videotape recorder which we borrowed from the Peace Corps for practice sessions. This enabled us to have run-throughs with teachers so they could practice, see themselves on re-play, and refine their technique before the actual filming. With a couple of minor goofs, the first take was it when we did the filming.

Many schools today have videotape recorders. The use of these recorders can serve effectively in training in filmmaking as well as training in an important media form in itself. Use of the camera, sighting of subjects, speed for turning and motion, lighting, length of sequences and so forth can all be practiced without wasting expensive film—which needs to be developed first anyway before one knows what has been filmed and accomplished. Instant playback of recording sessions is very valuable in helping students to evaluate the content, structure, and technique involved in their work. A Polaroid camera is very useful in getting instant feedback in still filming, especially when doing three-slide or three-picture sequences.

When a theme is chosen, it is interesting to film both in motion and with stills at the same time to evaluate what has been accomplished. It is important to see that often a theme or story can be more effectively illustrated with stills rather than with motion, and vice versa. By experimenting with both at the same time, a comparison can be made.

The active involvement of students in experimenting with various media forms, if given some structure and direction and assistance from the teacher, can be the type of learning experience that provides a needed lift to a school program, in any subject. I know of a situation where a disenchanted high school student was ready to drop out of school on several occasions, but remained in school because of one teacher who helped him follow up an interest in filmmaking. He completed a superb film, showing imagination and depth of thought no one had ever recognized or suspected. He did finally drop out of school, unfortunately, but is presently happily

working as a film technician in private industry.

An added benefit of student involvement in creative uses of the media, though certainly not its main purpose, is the added insight into young people revealed by their thinking, planning, and filmmaking. The theme or story as it is developed tells us much. The two themes cited earlier for the three-slide sequences on the law and pollution were real themes that students chose.

I challenge you to undertake an experiment with your students. You select several themes, round up as many cameras as you can (many kids have still or movie cameras these days, some expensive, some inexpensive—it shouldn't be hard to round up at least one!) and as a starter give them a choice of producing either a three-slide sequence, a three-picture sequence, or a four-minute movie (standard cartridge length).

Some themes might be:

The law is	Pollution is . . . .
Love is	Sharing is . . . .
Caring is	Success is . . . .
Happiness is	The Secret Me . . . .

Space limitations prevent me from going much farther, but a few ideas briefly related to using still film, movie film, pictorial essay, or audio or videotape recordings: dress-rehearsals of plays, dramatizations, role playing, simulation games; dramatizations of books read, book reports in a different key, perhaps using hand puppets to illustrate characters; exchange of audio and videotapes with other schools around the country—a visual Pen-Pal; production of a four-minute film on any subject, placed in a cartridge for a permanent record of an event; production of a documentary or pictorial essay on a local or national problem, such as pollution, racial understanding, community problem, etc.

Once you get started with a carefully thought-out program exploring the various forms and uses of the media, the sky is the

limit. Ideas will come thick and fast from the students themselves, along with enthusiasm. The learning environment will never be the same. The process that students go through is really the important thing, however, not the product, though to them this seems to be the source of satisfaction. Creative involvement in the media can well help to avoid some of the tedia. Try it! You'll like it!

Teaching (Visual) Composition with Polaroid and Slides

Chuck McVinney
President, NESEA

One problem usually faced by beginning film teachers is "Where do I start?" It's a logical question because there is still skimpy information and little text material for teachers to use. Nevertheless, it is not as difficult to find a beginning as some novices have supposed.

Since most teachers who start film courses or include film study in their programs are English teachers, they already have a well developed expertise they should take advantage of; namely, their ability to handle problems of composition. Composition, after all, is not a process unique to the user of words, or the teacher of English. The musician uses notes of a scale to make his melody, just as the dancer organizes bodily movements in her choreography.

Film, like the other arts, has its basic elements, or more appropriately, its own language. The language is an identifiable one, with its own processes and stylistic possibilities. The most obvious thing about the language of visual media is that it is new, or at least comparatively new, and we are just beginning to develop ways to talk about it, and, therefore, teach about it. But precisely